

Written Copy: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 “Admonishing, Whose Job is It?”

3rd Sunday in Advent

Sunday December 13th, 2020

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 (Greek Translation)

¹⁴ Now we are personally exhorting you, brothers, to continue encouraging and admonishing those who are slacking in their lives of faith in the Church (disorderly), continue to comfort and encourage the fainthearted, continue to hold very close those who are weak and lacking, continue to be patient and long-suffering towards all. ¹⁵ Make sure that no one should render evil to anyone in exchange for evil, but at all times be pursuing what is good toward one another and toward all.

Exegetical Statement

Paul has been encouraging the Thessalonian Church to continue living God pleasing lives, because the Last Day will come without warning, and will catch those who are living outside the faith unaware with no time to repent. They are to live lives active in their faith and encouraging one another to do the same. For this reason, Paul makes an earnest appeal as their bishop to keep an eye of appreciation on those who have been toiling tirelessly to keep them living in faith through encouraging and admonishing words. In fact he asks them to consider them and their work with and ever increasing Christ-like love so that they willingly work with them. Paul then exhorts each individual member to take up his call of encouraging and admonishing one another in the faith, especially those who are slacking in living God pleasing lives. Bring comfort and encouragement to those who are growing fainthearted from the opposition the world brings. They are to continue close and personal support of those weak in body and soul. And through all this exhibit longsuffering patience towards all. No one should render evil in response to evil, but instead each one should pursue what is good toward one another and all—even those outside the congregation. They are to be constant in their rejoicing, constant in their praying, giving thanks to God in all circumstances because this is the desire of God for those in Christ Jesus. He charges them to never stifle or suppress the work of the Holy Spirit within them or among them, and never treat the prophetic word with contempt—as though it lacked any real value. Instead, they are to put what is taught to them to the test and examine it in light of Scripture, holding fast to all which is good, making it their own. They are to separate themselves from every instance, form, or appearance of evil. In this way the God of peace will Himself continue the work of sanctifying them and keeping their entire being: spirit, soul, and body, blameless for the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who has called them. He is always faithful and will make this happen.

Focus Statement:

Pastor's and elders are God's gift and a tool of the Spirit to work sanctification in us and keep us blameless at the 2nd coming of Christ. Through them we are pointed to Christ's work for us and He keeps us dressed in His garment of salvation as we hold fast to His Gospel and His truth with repentant hearts

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

How often do we fail to regard Pastor's or Elder's admonition with serious consideration of with the love in which it's intended? How often do we see the job of admonishing the slack as being only Pastor's and not each one of us? How often do we regard some warnings against unbiblical teachings as trifling, and in doing so fail to steer clear of evil traps the devil may be laying?

What the hearer should do as a result:

Regard the good work that leaders and laity do with the love that lays behind it. Test what we hear against Scripture and doctrinal witness and hold fast to what is good. Be patient with those around us who struggle to live Christ-like lives in difficult times, just as we sometimes struggle

Subject Sentence: All Serve as Spirit's Tool to Keep Each Blameless

Introduction: Admonishing and Encouraging. My Job?

You better watch out! You better not cry! You better not pout! Do you want to know why? Because if I walk into a room and hear that kind of sappy secular Christmas trash music on the radio, I may smash it to the floor! (*I am just joking...maybe 😊*). Now around the office I kind of have the reputation of being a “grinch” when it comes to Christmas music. But that assessment is not entirely fair. I don’t mind the Christmas Carols and Christmas Hymns, and now is the perfect time for them. What I can’t stand is the secular Christmas music that most stations play. And for me its not so much that they leave Christ out of Christmas. I understand why they do that. It’s because for too many years that’s what I had to listen to non-stop working at Hillers every Christmas season. I’ve had my fill of “Santa Clause is Coming to Town”, “I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas”, “Jingle Bells”, “Sleigh Ride”; you get the picture. Occasionally, when I worked an evening shift, I would switch the satellite channel from Secular Christmas to Christian Christmas. And you want to know something? No customer every complained or acted like they even noticed, even though we had a substantial number of Jewish Clientele. I did get into trouble for doing that. It resulted in a most unpleasant confrontation with the General Manager. And it wasn’t because a customer complained about it, or because he walked in when it was on. But because one of my head cashiers, who had access to the office saw which station I put on, complained behind my back to the General Manager, who then read me the riot act.

As much as I dislike listening to secular Christmas music, I will concede there is a usefulness to one of those secular Christmas songs: “Santa Clause is Coming to Town”. The message in the lyrics “You better not shout, you better not cry, you better not pout...” is a very useful one for parents this time of year, especially those who have strong willed children. In other words, it’s telling them you better start behaving if you want to get any presents. Now, this is not a sermon about how Christian parents should deal with the subject of Santa Clause. But no matter who brings the presents to your house it can be useful information for the strong-willed child of any age to realize that: the better you behave, the better your presents may be. Now, I’m not recommending this in any kind of a spiritual sense, but in a secular sense it has been known to work. In fact, children of all ages, including us adults, need to be reminded how to behave and follow the rules for the good of all. Even Store managers who switch the radio station.

And that’s what I want to discuss this morning, our need to be admonished and encouraged, as we are all children of Christ’s kingdom, who at times behave poorly. So, whose job is it to do this spiritual admonishing and encouraging? You are probably thinking that it’s the Pastor’s job, or perhaps even the Elders job. And you would be right. But as we do this job, how ready are you to receive admonishment and encouragement? I have rarely had anyone yell or quarrel with me over something I preached or taught in Bible Study. But I sometimes wonder if at times people take what is taught with a grain of salt, especially when it stands counter to what they hold dear in their hearts. When it

stands counter to how you really live your life apart from Sunday mornings. We all have dark closets in our heart with pet things, and notions that we know are not exactly God pleasing, but we can't bear to part with them. So, we hide them away, put a lock on the door, and block access to them by God's Word, which aims at breaking down that door and bringing these things into the light.

Paul talks about what our attitude should be toward the admonishing and encouraging done through God's Word of truth. But he also tells us that this job of admonishing and encouraging is not exclusively on the shoulders of the pastor and the elders. It also rests on each one of you too.

What Paul Calls Pastors and Laity to Do

Paul first addresses the call of pastors and elders in **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** **"¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves."** Paul is making an earnest request as the one who not only planted this Church but worked to build it up despite the threats he faced from the Jews in Thessalonica for preaching and teaching that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and Son of God. He wants the congregation to continue to regard those he called and empowered in his place as pastors and elders as their spiritual leaders and caretakers. He makes a special request as their bishop that they continue to esteem these men very highly in love. In other words, to respect their message and work they do for the congregation out of love these men have for them, and the love and respect they are called to return. To esteem them by making their job easier, by not fighting back or quarreling, but to take what they say to heart. The result being that each member would live in peace with one another, which is what Jesus calls us to do as our witness to each other and to the world. It's how I hope and pray you regard me and my ministerial work on your behalf.

Now this does not mean that whatever I say you should accept no matter what and without reservation. Paul goes on to say in **1 Thessalonians 5:19-21** **"¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good."** As was the subject of our 1st Mid-Week Advent Service the Holy Spirit does powerful work through His Word preached, read, and sung. We should never disregard what is being taught from His Word as if it has no meaning for us, no purpose for us, no application for us. Keep in mind, what may not apply now, may become very important soon enough. But you may hear something that makes you pause, makes you question, sits uneasy within you. Paul says you should test everything. Does Scripture agree with what is being taught? Does what we find in our Small Catechism agree with what is being taught?

If it does, then that uneasiness may come from your blocking the Spirit's attack on one of your precious dark closets that you don't want His Word to enter. If that is the case, then to continue to ignore what is being taught is to despise God's word of instruction. It amounts to quenching and stifling the work of the Holy Spirit. Nothing good will come of that. If what is being taught agrees with Scripture and what we confess and believe, then we should hold fast to it. And if it is pointing out sin that exists in dark closets of our heart, we should repent of it.

But Paul not only charges pastors and elders to do this work of admonishing and encouraging. In **1 Thessalonians 5:14-15** he addresses each of you as members of the Church. **"¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."** Here Paul exhorts each and every member of the congregation to be involved in the work of admonishing and encouraging. Admonish the idle. This does not refer to only those who are capable enough but refuse to work for a living. It also includes those who are idle and absent from doing the work God has given to each of us as members of His body. Christ is the one who called you here to be members, to be living stones in this congregation called Lamb of God. His Spirit has given all of you gifts, talents, spiritual gifts, and treasures to use toward the ministry we are called to do here. When we see someone lacking involvement, coasting along instead of using their lives as a living sacrifice to Christ, he says you should sit down with them. He doesn't say you should yell, scream, curse and swear. Instead, we are to admonish them with love, remembering that Jesus loves them just as He loves you. Remembering how patient and forgiving He has been with you, you are to be the same way with them.

We each have a responsibility to those who have been weakened in their faith walk by COVID-19, illness in their life or the life of a loved one, or any of the other myriad of problems going on in the world. We are to come alongside them. Be a prayerful and encouraging presence. Do a lot of listening and a minimal amount of talking to start with while they unload what has been bottled up in their hearts. Then share with them the only words that can make a difference. God's words of love, forgiveness, and strengthening. His promise of His continuing presence. Remind them that He is ruling at the right hand of the Father, even when it doesn't look like it. Give aid to those who are in need, whether it's a physical need, and emotional need, or a spiritual need. We do this one on one, but also as the gathered Church who are to make use of the gifts He has given us for just such a purpose.

And as we do the work of admonishing, or are the ones receiving the admonishing, we are to remember Paul's warning that no one should repay evil for evil. No one likes to be convicted of sin, and it's easy to take offense at the one who is acting as the Spirit's means to do so. As one who is called to point out how you may be living contrary to God's will and plan I may, as a sinner myself, go a little too far, lack in patience and tact, even say something not meaning harm, but touching upon one of those dark closets in your heart.

Your reaction may be to respond in anger and indignation, or even to disregard what I'm saying. Paul's reminder about being patient, and not returning an evil response with another evil response is a very important thing to remember as we do this work the Spirit calls us to.

And as far as indifference goes, when it comes to opposing what God's Word clearly teaches is wrong, are there really any indifferent matters? Paul warns each of us in **1 Thessalonians 5:22** "**Abstain from every form of evil.**" Abstain from evil, avoid evil at all costs, run the other way. Do not give sin a foothold in your life. That includes even those things other denominations might hold different than us, such as the definition of marriage, cohabitation, and transgenderism. These things are sometimes seen as not affecting the Gospel message outright. But continuing to live in sin, opposing what God's says is wrong, can serve to grieve the Holy Spirit whose presence keeps saving faith alive in us. These things can work like leaven where a small amount works to infect the whole lump.

What is the Reason We Are To Do This Work?

You may be thinking to yourself: this is not an easy task. And your right. It's not an easy task for pastors and elders. And its not an easy task for the laity to take up with one another. There is plenty of room for our sinful hearts, prodded and fueled by sinful pride, egged on by the devil's whisperings, to go off the rails and do more damage than good. How are we to approach this with a correct spirit and attitude?

By keeping in mind the reason Paul gives for these exhortations. And that reason is found in **1 Thessalonians 5:23** "**Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" The reason is that just as God the Son came to earth to be born as Jesus of Nazareth on Christmas Day, we are to know for certain there is another day coming when He will return. And you and I need to be ready for that day, whether we are alive when He comes or have passed on. The problem is we cannot get ready or remain ready on our own. For that we need the work of the Holy Spirit, who has chosen to work through the means of God's powerful word that we share with one another.

The best reason for you to be admonishers in the hands of the Spirit is the love that was poured into your heart by Christ Himself. The love that drove Him to the cross to be the willing sacrifice for your sins. The love that moved Him to hang there until all of your sins were considered "paid in full". The love that made Him rise from the grave to give you the sure and certain promise that on that day He returns, you too will rise from the grave, not to suffer eternal punishment, but to live in His eternal glory forever. The love that moved Him to send His Spirit upon you and into you in your baptism. The love which moved the Holy Spirit to change your heart and mind so that you believe that Jesus suffering, death, and resurrection was for you. That's the love that keeps the Spirit at work in your life and in mine. That's the love that sends God's words of law to break down those precious hidden

doors in your heart. To one-by-one break them open and drag that sin out into the light where Jesus's suffering, death, and resurrection destroys their power over you forever. That's the love of Jesus at work in you to make you His precious child, His living sacrifice. To sanctify you, to change your body, soul, and spirit so that on the last day, as you stand before Christ, you stand blameless. You stand with no sinful charges against you. You stand with nothing that would exclude you from eternal glory. You stand righteous before Him. That love of Jesus is the reason and the power to be admonishers and encouragers in the hands of the Spirit.

Doing the Work of Admonishing and Encouraging

That is the aim of the Spirit as He uses you and I to do this work given to the Church: to bring the love and grace of Jesus Christ to bear upon each of our lives. And that should be our aim as we do this work. We are not to do this not out of a spirit of superiority, or revenge, or even to take the focus off our own shortcomings. We do it out of love. Out of the love of Christ Jesus: that sacrificial and forgiving love that seeks not to return evil for evil but seeks what is best in the eyes of God for you, for your neighbor, and even for those around you who don't know His wonderful saving love.

The Spirit doesn't need us to do this work. But He chooses to use broken sinful people like you and me to do this work. He chooses us to be admonishers of one another's sins. We do this not standing outside the boat of sinful people, yelling at those within the boat "You are all sinners". But we are to stand in the boat with them, saying "We are sinners". And then share with them the answer for our sin, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We share those words of love that are the Absolution, the Gospel message: that even though we sin much, there is no sin that Christ did not take care of on the cross. He makes you good enough for eternal life. He is the power behind your sanctification: the process by which the Spirit changes you and grows your faith. And as Paul testifies to you and me in **1 Thessalonians 5:24** "**He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.**"

Conclusion

I still can't tolerate large doses of secular Christmas music, especially certain ones that were played over and over endlessly from my days at Hillers. But it was wrong of me to turn on the Christian Christmas music station, especially since I knew it was against the wishes of the owner of the store and those he had put in place to manage it. And it was right that I was admonished for it. The General Manager could've done it in a nicer way I suppose. He didn't need to dress me down in front of employees that I was to manage. And at the time I was very angry and indignant about it. I was ready to repay evil for evil. But there was a calming presence that came over me, that of the Holy Spirit. He was at work changing my life. And at that point He kept me from returning evil for evil. He made me keep my mouth shut. He was on that day and continues to be at work in my life through the power of His word preached to me by others. And He's not exactly done with me yet. There

are still some of those dark and barricaded sinful closets to be opened, and their contents drug out into the light of God's Word and Christ's sacrifice so that they are destroyed forever. I am a work in progress. And I have the assurance of the Words of our Lord that He will finish what He started

You are a work in progress too. And we do need to watch out, watch out for ourselves and each other. We do need to cry at times, cry with sorrow over our sins. We should never pout; that we be impeding the work the Holy Spirit in our lives. And I'm telling you why; not because Santa Clause is coming, but One far greater. The One who made all things and keeps all things going. The One who came as a child on Christmas day to be your Savior and Lord as well as mine. The One who will surely come on the Last Day to give us the best present of all: eternal life. He is the true faithful one. And He will do it. Amen.